**[SHERMAN ALEXIE](http://fallsapart.com/)**

* [MEMOIR](http://fallsapart.com/front-home-page/)

      If you're reading this open letter then you're probably aware that I recently published a memoir, *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me*. The memoir is mostly about my relationship with my late mother, Lillian Alexie. She was a complicated and difficult person. She was sometimes cruel and often cold. I loved her, yes, but I sometimes hated her, too. She was brilliant, funny, beautiful, generous, vindictive, deceitful, tender, manipulative, abusive, loving, and intimidating. She was one of the last fluent speakers of our tribal language. The language is being taught again. And that's wonderful and life-giving. But when my mother died, she took with her so many words, stories, and songs that will never be heard again. Lillian was a storyteller in Spokane and English. She was also a quilter, an amazing artisan and artist. She was industrious and visionary.

          And, after writing this memoir, I am able to proudly admit that I inherited many of my mother's best qualities and ruefully confess that I also inherited many of her worst.

         I am my mother's son.

         Lillian haunted me when she was alive. And she has haunted me since her death in July, 2015.

         And she has haunted me in spectacular ways since I published my memoir a month ago. She has followed me from city to city during my promotional book tour.

         On three consecutive nights, in three different cities, police and ambulance sirens rang out as I told the story about the moment I learned of my mother's death.

         In another city, in a hotel whose decor can best be described as Bram Stroker's Ikea, I stepped out of the elevator to see a handmade quilthanging on the wall. Why was such a quaint piece of Americana being displayed in such a trendy hotel?

         "Hello, Mom," I said to that quilt each time I walked by it.

         Last night, as I returned to Seattle, I stepped off my plane to see an airport valet waiting with a wheelchair for one of my fellow passengers. That valet held a sign with a familiar name—a name that made me laugh. That valet was waiting to ferry somebody named Lillian.

         As I write in the memoir, I don't believe in ghosts, but I see them all the time.

         As I also write in the memoir, I don't believe in magic, but I believe in interpreting coincidence exactly the way you want to.

         I don't believe in the afterlife as a reality, but I believe in the afterlife as metaphor. And my mother, from the afterlife, is metaphorically kicking my ass.

         Two weeks ago, during a private academic event, I was speaking to a man from another country. The room was crowded and busy and loud. That man and I had to raise our voices in order to hear each other.

         I loudly told him about my memoir. I loudly told him about my tribe. I loudlytold him about my mother. I loudly told him that she was a ghost who haunted me.

         And then, suddenly, all of the conversations in the room stopped. The silence was abrupt and surprising. Thirty strangers were acutely aware of this awkward silence. Thirty strangers laughed together.

         "Sherman," the man from another country said to me. "In my culture, when those kind of silences happen, we say that God just passed by."

         "That's beautiful," I said.

         The man talked about his tribe. Then he asked me more about my tribe,

         "Sherman," he said. "Your tribe's name, Spokane, what does it mean?"

         I said, "It means 'Children of the Sun.'"

         At that moment, the gray summer clouds parted and a bolt of sunlight shot through a small window and illuminated me.

         I narrowed my eyes against the glare.

         But my new friend, the man from another country, looked at the light and said, "Ah, Sherman, I think your mother just arrived. It is good to meet her."

         I laughed. But I wanted to sob. I did sob later that night. I have been sobbing many times a day during this book tour. I have sobbed in private and I have sobbed onstage.

         I have been rebreaking my heart night after night. I have, to use recovery vocabulary, been retraumatizing myself.

         Last week, I fell ill with a terrible headcold and had to cancel events in Tulsa and Missoula. But I also fell ill with depression. I medicated my headcold. I quickly healed from that simple malady. But I couldn't medicate my sadness—my complicated grief.

         I sobbed and sobbed, and then I got on another airplane amd continued my book tour.

         But then, in the fifteenth or twentieth hotel room of this summer, I dreamed.

         In this dream, I entered the movie, Smoke Signals, and became Victor Joseph as he ran through the night to save a woman injured in a car wreck. I ran through the desert night. I ran through fire and the memory of fire. I ran until my feet bled. I ran until dawn. I ran until I collapsed exhausted to the road.

         In the movie, the collapsed Victor Joseph reaches toward a vision of his dead father. But it is a hallucination. Victor is actually reaching toward a highway construction worker.

         In my dream, I am the one fallen to the road. And I reach toward a vision of my dead mother. But she is also the highway construction worker. And she is holding a sign that says STOP.

         I think the meaning of that dream is obvious.

         It means I am supposed to stop this book tour. Because of the short notice, I'll still perform at my gigs in San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco this month. But I am cancelling all of my events in August and I will be cancelling many, but not all, of my events for the rest of the year,

         Dear readers and booksellers and friends and family, I am sorry to disappoint you. I am sorry that I will not be traveling to your cities to tell you my stories in person.

         But I will be writing.

         When I told Diane, my wife, about my mother's ghost and about my plans to cancel so many events, she said, "Maybe it's your mother taking care of you from Heaven."

         "Maybe," I said.

         "But I think it's probably your subconscious taking care of the rest of you. I think it's probably you being a good mother to yourself. You are mothering you."

         So here I am—the son and the mother combined—who needs to take a big step back and do most of my grieving in private. My memoir is still out there for you to read. And, when I am strong enough, I will return to the road. I will return to the memoir. And I know I will have new stories to tell about my mother and her ghost. I will have more stories to tell about grief. And about forgiveness.

         But for now, I can only apologize again for my unexpected retreat. And I thank you, over and over again, for your time, energy, and understanding.

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